WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

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PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

JOURNALISTS: Ian Williams, Al-Wasat of London
Victoria Graham, Associated Press
Tuyet Nguyen, United Press International

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

UNEP

Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) stresses the need for a unified global action to safeguard the environment. He calls on rich countries to commit more resources to combat environmental problems. Mr. Tolba believes that global co-operation is needed to translate the Rio Agreements into action.

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VOICE: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Over the last few decades, industrial development and modern technology have improved the standard of living in many parts of the world. But, at a high cost to our environment. Increasing global warming, ozone depletion, soil erosion and deforestation and pollution everywhere. Meanwhile, it's been recognized that environment and economic development are closely linked. How can we strike a balance between protecting our environment and achieving sustainable development and growth? What action must the international community take to safeguard the environment?

Our guest today is one of the principle figures in the international efforts to protect the global environment. He is Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme. A national of Egypt, Mr. Tolba will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Ian Williams of Al-Wasat of London; Victoria Graham of the Associated Press; and Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International.

Before we talk to Mr. Tolba, let's take a look at one country's efforts to strike a balance between development and protecting the environment. Our correspondent Steve Whitehouse reports.

WHITEHOUSE:
This may look like something out of a swashbuckling movie, but it's a reconstruction of a recent battle

between two tribes in Mali in which three died and a dozen were injured.

TUAREG: [IN LOCAL DIALECT]
One of their men came running up, tackled one of our men, sat on him, knifed him in the stomach, and killed him.

WHITEHOUSE:
The fighting being re-enacted was provoked when herdsmen fleeing parched grassland moved their cattle onto the dwindling pasture of a local tribe. It showed how a decade-long drought had put intense pressure on natural resources, especially this grass, known as "bourgou".

The wetland here is one of Africa's most fertile environments. It provides a livelihood for a million fisherman, farmers and nomadic herdsmen. But the drought is threatening to turn it into a dustbowl.

When there's enough rain, the bourgou grass beds are breeding grounds that yield sixty thousand tons of fish a year. They're safe havens for millions of migratory birds. And as the flood waters subside, the sink area becomes rich pastures, a Malian cow's idea of heaven.

As the lakes dried up, so did the bourgou grass, the basis of local agriculture. Overgrazing added to the environmental disaster.

READEX
FICHE

This community was once on the shore of a large lake. Now their fields are five miles walk away.

CARAWDO: [IN LOCAL DIALECT]
The years of the drought wore our people into the ground. They were exhausted. Our herds were wiped out.

WHITEHOUSE:
The United Nations Sudano Sahelian office is funding a project to help regenerate the bourgou grass. Local villagers take stocks from still healthy areas and replant them where bourgou has died.

Six months later, the lake is brimming with life, but the new system is inevitably changing age-old patterns of life.

To ensure the pasture survives, especially in drought periods, it may mean that once nomadic tribes will have to take up a settled life. Reviving bourgou pasture in Mali -- just one example of how communities are trying to strike the balance between development and the environment.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Tolba, we've just seen an example of people trying, or failing, as the case may be, to strike a balance. I guess that most thinking people throughout the world are deeply concerned about the environment, but when it comes to taking the hard choices, they often back away from the decisions that might help protect the environment. In this difficult situation, do you feel, or does your programme feel, that the battle is being won, or is it sort of -- are you just running in place?

TOLBA: No, I think definitely the battle is on the side of the environment. It's not a losing battle. It's -- if we take the mere fact that the people are doing what you just said now, they are trying, they understand that the issue of the destruction of the natural resources is a problem that they have to face if they have to develop and continue surviving. The old link between environment and simply pollution is no longer there in the mind of anybody. It's a clear relationship between the growth, or economic growth, which is introduced by the process of development, and the proper management of the natural resources. The public are now aware of this probably in the north much more than in the south, although I would say that in the north as well, there is plenty of linking between environment and pollution, and not with natural resources.

LITTLEJOHNS: We've had the pleasure of having you on this programme before. Perhaps you could mention a few examples of achievements that have been made in the last year or so.

TOLBA: Well, I would say in the last couple of years the major achievements are on the side of global co-operation to manage the major environmental problems. One of course is the older issue of ozone, which was tackled partially in 1987, by the Montreal Protocol. In 1990, there was a major breakthrough in the establishment of a special fund to assist the developing countries not to continue with the destructive chemicals which destroy the ozone layer, to leapfrog the technologies which are destructive. That was the first case of a international fund which was governed jointly by developed and developing countries on equal footing. Definitely, that was a first. The two other examples on global issues are the protection of the -- well, again, it's the global warming and climate change -- the Convention that was signed at the time of the Rio Conference. And the third element, the loss of biological resources which are the base of life, The base of our

food, the base of pharmaceuticals, of chemical industries, of all that we have, again, a treaty was agreed upon by the nations of the world and signed at Rio. Each of the two treaties, to the great surprise of everybody, were signed by more than one hundred and fifty governments. That's the first time in the history of any international treaties, that these numbers signed as a signal of co-operation and a majeure force of co-operation, a signal that the world cannot do it in groups or in countries, even if they are very rich and very powerful.

WILLIAMS: Mr. Tolba, your agency, the United Nations Environmental Programme, describes itself as a David and as a catalyst, but in the case of Rio, there's a lot of disappointment, because the ensuing treaty on global warming did not -- mostly at the insistence of the United States -- did not include any mandatory limits on carbon dioxide emissions. And it was an interesting contrast that the Montreal Convention, which protected people with my skin color in the north, in the northern hemisphere from ozone layer depletion and ultraviolets, was rushed through, but the global warming treaty, in which a lot of tropical islands are faced with inundation, seems to have been treated very much as a lesser priority. Would you like to comment on that? Were you disappointed that there were no mandatory limits on carbon dioxide emissions?

TOLBA: Well, sure, I am disappointed, because I was -- I was saying -- calling for a mandatory stabilization and a reduction of 20 per cent four years ago or three years ago. But the fact that that did not reach a conclusion on the targets does not mean that it is a failure. What you said about ozone and the Montreal Protocol, the Montreal Protocol came after the Vienna Convention. The Vienna Convention, in 1985, to protect the ozone layer, simply said that the countries of the world are going to co-operate to cut down the ozone depleting substances. It was two years later that the

Montreal Protocol came with the specific targets, which were very weak at the beginning and everybody was attacking them, but it was very much strengthened in 1990, three years later. And I'm sure that it will be much, much more strengthened this coming October, November in Copenhagen, in a meeting of the parties. The reason? That ozone has been clearly linked with the individuals with the health condition. You said it yourself. People with my color of the skin are quite afraid of skin cancer, so you are asking your government to act. And every other individual in the same category is asking his or her government to act. That's not the case yet with climate, that the individuals are not themselves identifying with the issues, or the impacts of climate change. But I'm sure that within a couple of years at the latest, then if it doesn't happen, I'm sure that there will be protocol that will be very strict, setting targets and getting concrete figures to cut down carbon dioxide, not the coverage of the issue of greenhouse gases, which is very flexible, but carbon dioxide in particular, is the main culprit. If it doesn't happen then, I would be really very disappointed that the governments and the world are not serious.

GRAHAM: Mr. Tolba, further on the Earth Summit, when it ended Maurice Strong said "We have to make sure the road from Rio is a fast track". How fast is it? And specifically in terms of funding. During the Summit, $6 to $8 billion dollars in additional funds were committed we understand. How much of that is forthcoming? We know that at least $70 billion dollars more than current levels of assistance are needed.

TOLBA: $70 billion dollars are needed, I'm sure that you are basing yourself on the $55 billion dollars that are already existing now in official development assistance, and the $125 billion dollars that were calculated by Maurice Strong and his secretariat. Well that, let me be very clear: nobody can say that these figures are

correct, whether they're on the lower side or the higher side neither Maurice Strong and his staff themselves and the governments. These are orders of magnitude to show the world how serious the deficit is and the need to control environmental issues. What has been stated in Rio, what you said about $6 or $7 billion dollars, is a drop in the bucket. I don't think that anybody would be satisfied with that sort of figure. There are limited number of countries who have committed themselves, the rest, there is an expectation, or shall I say there's still an expectation that some of them will be forthcoming in the General Assembly, which is convening this spring in New York. How far this will come, remains to be seen. The replenishment of the global environmental facility, we are all expecting that there will be a replenishment next year and at a high level. What we have now is $1.3 billion US dollars for three years, what is the next three years? Is it 10? Is it 7? Is it 5? Still, it remains to be seen. What we heard from Mr. Kohl and Mr. John Major is anywhere between $2 and $4 billiondollars. But, for what? For three years, or per year? The statements were not concrete. We are now expecting to hear some concrete figures.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, our guest is Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

NGUYEN: Mr. Tolba, the environment as well as the economic issues have been dividing north and south, rich and poor countries more than it has unified those two sides. What have the Earth Summit and the Agenda 21 done to bridge the gap between poor and rich countries?

TOLBA: I don't think it did much to bridge the gap. I think you are probably making a half correct statement, that environment and development are dividing the north and south. I would really

say that environment has not been dividing the north and south. Environment has been unifying the north and the south for the simple reason that it became very clear over the last six, seven years that on global environmental issues, none of them can do it alone. The rich cannot do it alone: the ozone is the concrete example! They are suffering from the destruction of the ozone layer, but they cannot go and cut down the chlorofluorocarbons and the substances that deplete the ozone layers, of which they produce and consume 90 per cent of today's amount. But if the developing countries go on developing, that 90 per cent is going to be reversed in the next 10 years. There will be another 90 per cent produced and used by the developing countries. So they have to work with the developing countries. That is the force of environment unifying everybody, because everybody knows that in the environment they are all connected, they are all partners in it.

The process of development has always been a fight about the development between the north and south. I negotiated on behalf of my government some 30 years ago, the first international development strategy when I was in the cabinet of my government. And that -- we spoke there of the .7 per cent of the gross national product, in 1959, adopted in 1960. At that time we were speaking of .35 per cent what is available of the gross national product. Today in 1992, 30 years later, we are still speaking of .7 per cent, and the .35 is still .35. So the difficulty is on the issues of development, the issues of trade, commodity prices, unfair relations between the north and the south on the trade issues, but not on the environment, particularly the global environmental problems.

WILLIAMS: One other initiative that you've been associated with, I understand, is the Basel Convention on the transfer of hazardous wastes. And I think a lot of us were very disturbed recently to hear that an Italian company had tried to take advantage

of the situation in Somalia to ship hazardous waste to that country. I understand that originally you were very strongly in favour of a complete ban on transfers from industrialized countries to developing countries of hazardous wastes. But the Basel Convention, as it came out, was not so definitive. Were you disappointed by this? Or do you think once again that this is something that can be expanded up?

TOLBA: It is. Well, I was definitely disappointed -- I'm always disappointed if I don't get the maximum level of support on the environment, but I'm also down to earth. I don't expect that I'm living in a vacuum. There are political situations, there are economic situations, there are costs and benefits, and I am quite satisfied with the first step -- probably I'm following the Chinese idiom, a thousand miles starts with one step. And in every case I presume that what we managed to get in UNEP is not one step, it's probably a hundred miles. On the thousand miles, it is easy to go through the remaining once you start moving. I was disappointed with the fact that there's no ban from the north to the south. I am still calling for a ban from the members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to the developing countries because they don't have the capacity to deal with them, number one. Number two, they are poor and they would take the hazardous waste in return for $50 million dollars or so, and we have examples of that. $50 million dollars in some countries is almost the budget of that country. If you lure somebody with $5 or $6 million dollars, you are there. So there is definitely a need to have a moral responsibility regarding these countries until they are in a position to handle their own problems with regards to the hazardous waste.

GRAHAM: Mr. Graham, UNEP has been described as the environmental conscience of the UN system. Do you ever find UN

agencies for example, in development or other programmes, doing things which harm the environment or could harm the environment? How do you co-ordinate with them? And also, does UNEP ever take sides on major issues, say construction of a dam which will have adverse environmental effects, or is that just considered a domestic issue?

TOLBA: On the first one, I don't think that the agencies, if you are talking about United Nations agencies, are actually specialized agencies or even the programmes, like UNDP and UNICEF are doing things which would harm the environment. I must say that over the last four, five, six years, environment is talked about in every agency as much as it is an organ of the United Nations and as much as it is talked about in UNEP itself. And that is a sense of pride for UNEP, that we managed to catalyze and get it that high on the agenda. Probably the financing agencies, if you are trying to hint at this in a decent way, some of the financing agencies probably still do not take the environmental impact assessments results seriously. But I think the public, the Non-Governmental Organizations, and the governments themselves are making it clear that they would not like this to continue, and I think that is a big move for the World Bank who, for example, is having a huge environment department. It is not a matter of just a camouflage, or an issue sprinkled on the top of the cake, it is taken now as a serious problem. How do we co-ordinate? We have mechanisms to coordinate, one of them is the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination itself which is headed by the Secretary-General, and on it sits something like 20, 25 heads of agencies and programmes of the United Nations. They meet twice or three times a year, and an item on their agenda is environment, or environment and development in a number of cases. Did I miss anything that you raised?

GRAHAM: One other thing. In the case of, let's say, a major domestic development project, such as the construction of a dam which will have adverse environmental impact, does UNEP ever take sides? Does it ever urge, you know, a halt?

TOLBA: Oh, yes. Yes. Provided we get the proper information but I don't go by rumours, and I don't go by reports. In the media, for example I have to get the facts and if I get the facts, I interfere with the government. I interfered with the government of Kenya where we are hosted on the use of water from one of the lakes to another lake, and the situation is changing. I interfered with Kenya, and with the two bilateral donor countries who were financing that.

NGUYEN: How did you view the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development, How do you want it to be composed so that it would not become an instrument, you know, in which people point fingers at each other?

TOLBA: Well, pointing fingers at each other is not a bad thing, if it is not rhetoric, if you are putting facts. And there's no point, there's no need to point ones fingers if it would be harassment. There could be an exchange of views, there could be a question and answer. What are the difficulities that are causing this country to go in this particular direction? And then how far it could be assisted and helped to avoid the mistakes it is having. What I would want to see the Commission composed of are governments, whether it's 53 governments, 56, 100 governments, that's up to the governments to decide. But what I am really concerned about, is that it is not another token shop. It is not another forum where the ministers or the high level officials come with written statements back at the capitals, read them, and walk out, because they don't even listen to the other delegates. I want

to see that the Commission is turning into a real forum to exchange views, a real general debate. We allow things like statements to pass for a debate, I want to structure the Commission to be designed in a way that ensures that there is debate and there are no monologues for two or three days of statements being read out.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Executive Director, you mentioned having intervened with the government of Kenya, which is the host country for your headquarters, in Nairobi. If we knew in the time that the Aswan High Dam in your country was built what we know now about the environment, do you think it still would have been a good project?

TOLBA: Well, it just happened by mere chance that I was chairing a committee in Cairo which was established by the late President Nasser, called the Post High Dam Problems Committee. There were maybe twenty of us, all independent scientists from the universities, and the academies and so on. And we defined everything that everybody's speaking about now, the side effects, which we call now the environmental impacts, and how to deal with them. And we concluded ultimately that the damages are far less than the benefits that are going to accrue to the country, provided that action is taken at that time to correct the damage or to stop the damage from happening. Unfortunately this did not happen, and that is why, because of several political and economic situations and so on, that the result, that the cost of correcting part of the damage is far too much, compared to what it should have been some thirty years ago, probably a thousand times more.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Tolba, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest has been Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Ian Williams, of Al-Wasat of London:

Victoria Graham, of the Associated Press; and Tuyet Nguyen, of United Press International.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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